



Gold King Mine Emergency Response

Qs & As

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY • REGION 8 • AUGUST 2015

What caused the discharge of contaminated water to the Animas River?

On August 5, 2015 at approximately 10:30 a.m., an EPA team working to investigate and address water contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County, Colorado, unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water from the mine adit (tunnel) into the upper portions of Cement Creek, a tributary of the Animas River. No workers were injured.

How much water was discharged?

USGS has evaluated data from a gauging station on Cement Creek. They have provided provisional data that 3,043,067 million gallons of mine waste water was released during this incident. The flow from the Gold King mine is decreasing and as of noon on August 8 was measured at 548 gallons per minute. The mine water is being effectively treated by a treatment system near the mine.

What is EPA doing to address the problem?

EPA will continue to:

- Treat mine drainage,
- Sample water and monitor the plume,
- Collect and present data to the community,
- Coordinate with federal, state, tribal and local entities,
- Provide status updates to officials and the public.

What are the risks to human health posed by the contaminated water?

Contaminated water should not be ingested. Anyone who comes into contact with the contaminated water should shower to remove contaminants.

EPA is coordinating with Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), in response to public health concerns or questions associated with the mine waste plume. ATSDR is communicating with local

health officials at San Juan County Basin Health Department in Colorado. Public health questions/concerns should be directed to Chris Poulet, ATSDR/R8 at 303-312-7013.

Who can answer my questions?

There will be a live-streamed public meeting at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, August 9, 2015 at Miller Middle School Auditorium, 2608 Junction Street, Durango. The link listen to the public meeting will be posted on the La Plata County website at <http://www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency>, San Juan Basin Health Department's Website at www.sjbhd.org, La Plata County Government Facebook and San Juan Basin Health Department Facebook.

A Public Call Center has been set up at La Plata County's Emergency Operations Center. Please call 970-385-8700 to get answers and request assistance with well sampling.

How can I get the latest information?

As additional information is received, it will be posted to the La Plata County website at <http://www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency>, San Juan Basin Health Department's Website at www.sjbhd.org, La Plata County Government Facebook and San Juan Basin Health Department Facebook. The EPA has set up a website for the event at www.epaosc.org/GoldKingMine. Links to this site are provided on the County's website and San Juan Basin Health Department's website as well.



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Is the drinking water safe?

People supplied by Durango's public water supply can feel confident the drinking water is safe. Drinking water intakes on the river were closed before the contaminated water reached the intakes. The EPA is asking that residents with wells in close proximity to the Animas River who have concerns about their well water contact the Call Center at 970-385-8700 to have their well sampled for heavy metal contaminants. Residents should not take their own samples; the EPA will send technicians to sample the water from homes. If discoloration is observed or residents have concerns, the EPA will provide bottled drinking water. Bottled water delivery and distribution centers are being established to provide alternative drinking water to the impacted public.

What water quality data is being collected?

EPA and others have amassed an extensive historical data record of water quality at the mine and downstream in Cement Creek and the Animas River. Comparing data being collected as part of the emergency response to this historical record will give us an indication of the spill's impacts and ultimately its return to pre-event conditions. EPA will be posting its raw data as well as data summary reports on its website (www.epaosc.org/GoldKingMine) as they become final.

When will it be safe to reopen our intakes on the river for drinking water and irrigation? When can I recreate on the river?

We are evaluating the water column data as we receive it. Sample transport, preparation, analysis and evaluation of metals takes at least 24-48 hours. EPA is working with state and local government officials to determine when to reopen both drinking water intakes and irrigation intakes and open the river for recreation.

Did the release kill fish?

We are working with USFWS and Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to evaluate aquatic impacts. CPW placed 108 sentinel fish at two locations in the river and one in a control tributary. As of August 7, one fish mortality was reported. We have not received information related to any other fish kills in the river, and encourage the public to call the Call Center at 970-385-8700 with information related to fish or other wildlife impacts.

How will EPA assist with response costs?

EPA is working expeditiously to get contracts in place with local government entities to provide services in support of EPA's response action to address environmental impacts of the release. EPA is also assessing all available legal and administrative avenues to address claims for damages resulting from this release.

What resources are deployed to address the incident?

As of August 8, 27 EPA employees and 13 EPA contractors are deployed to the incident. These employees are supported by teams in Denver and other EPA offices. EPA has an incident command in Durango, Colorado and Farmington, New Mexico. EPA is working to establish an Area Command with EPA Regions 6, 8 and 9, and tribal, federal, state and local governments in Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah. The goal of the incident command is to maintain a common operating picture, prioritize resource allocation, ensure consistent data and information sharing, and provide incident information to the public related to the regional, multi-jurisdictional event.

For additional information, please contact

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